

Lenten Devotional



NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Princeton, New Jersey

2021

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Nassau Presbyterian Church

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Scripture quotations are from the following texts:
*Common English Bible (CEB), King James Version (KJV or NKJV),
New International Version (NIV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).*

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Preface

Welcome to Lent Dear Friends!

Enclosed, please find a printed copy of our Daily Devotional writings for Week One of Lent 2021. The Season of Lent is a journey I look forward to each year. It comprises the 40 days before Easter (excluding Sundays, because Sundays are always celebrated as the Resurrection of our Lord).

We encourage you to find a daily spot to read, reflect, and meditate upon these daily scriptures and devotions. Each devotion is written by multi-generational members of our church and each week will be prepared and mailed to you by Lauren Yeh.

Take your time. Breathe. Be led by the Spirit who guides us to our Way, Truth, and Light.

With Lenten grace and peace,

Lauren J. McFeaters
Associate Pastor
Nassau Presbyterian Church
Lent 2021

Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey.

Psalm 119:105

Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1-12

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (Isaiah 58:6-7 NRSV).

Elizabeth Gift

Why aren't you listening to us, God? This is the question the Israelites posed a few verses before the focus passage. God replies that they say they are sorry for their sins, and still they keep on doing the same old thing. God says that a true apology is changed behavior, that actions speak louder than words. In Isaiah 58 God says when they change, their light will shine and they will bring great glory to God. I began to think about how we repent today. We don't fast. We ask for God's forgiveness. I think that, like the Israelites' fasting, our prayers of confession are empty if we don't also work for change. On Ash Wednesday we remember that we are fallible, sinful humans. Today we enter into a season of reflection and preparation for Easter. Many of us will begin some kind of Lenten practice. What will my practice look like? How can I work for justice for my brown and black siblings? How can I lighten burdens that we place on this planet? What do I have to share with those who are suffering due to the pandemic? Where can I direct my efforts so refugees feel welcome in our nation? Can I have hard conversations with my family or friends about systemic racism? Won't you join me? With God's help we can change our ways. Then our light will shine, bringing glory to God and healing to God's people and planet.

Loving God, we confess that we so often fall short of your way. Help us to choose your fast. Show us our sin, and guide us to act in ways that bring justice, lift burdens, share resources, and give life. Thank you for your steadfast love for and faithfulness to us always, for your Holy Scriptures, for your promises, and for your forgiveness through the sacrifice of your son Jesus. Amen.



Elizabeth is mom to two adults and two teenagers, and wife to Kevin. She serves as a Ruling Elder, on the Youth Ministry Committee, and as secretary of the Princeton Presbyterians of the Westminster Foundation Board, and is an active participant in Breaking Bread. She is grateful for the ways she and her family have been blessed during the pandemic, and longs for the day when the Nassau Church family is back together in person.

Thursday

Daniel 9:1-14

“Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you” (Daniel 9:7–8 NIV).

Agnes Olah

Lent is the season of penance, confession and prayer. Daniel’s prayer is a perfect start. I have read these verses in the past and noted now something with new insight. David is confessing not only his sin, but the sin of the entire nation and more, asking forgiveness not only for himself but for thousands of others. About 500 years later, Jesus on the cross has done the same. He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are

doing” (Luke 23:34).

I was up to this point of writing this devotional on January 6th when I got a message to turn on the TV. Washington, the nation’s capital, thousands of violent people...you know the rest. I realized that 2,500 years after Daniel, it is still appropriate to confess the sins of thousands or millions of people and pray over and over for forgiveness. Not only during the 40 days of Lent, between Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday, but for a lifetime.

I take New Year’s Resolutions very seriously. Two years ago, one of my ten resolutions was to turn from being a local Christian to a global Christian. To pray every week for a different nation. That year I covered 52 countries, mostly in the continents of the Americas and Europe. I will continue to pray until I cover all 195 countries of the world. We are all sinners and Jesus died on the cross for all of us who believe in him and the God of Resurrection hears all prayers.

Father, thank you for the empty tomb that proves Jesus conquered the sin and death. Help us to confess for ourselves and for the others, to be faithful in prayer and to live the life of faith. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.



Agnes was born and grew up in Hungary. Her parents raised her religiously. Lent was a special time in Hungary. However, it was done a bit differently than here in the United States. Instead of giving up something (chocolate, for example), children and adults were encouraged to do something good for other people. She remembers her mom preparing a basket of food every year that Agnes delivered to a poor widow in the neighborhood. Nowadays, she tries to use both of these traditions during Lent.

Friday

Psalm 9

The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble (Psalm 9:9 NRSV).

Marshall McKnight

This Lent is special. It's our pandemic Lent 2.0.

In the January 2021 issue of *Harper's Magazine* Fred Bahnson writes of his search for the Lord's stronghold among "contemplatives," disciples who make room for meditation in their faith journey to enable a different mindset that steers away from a dualistic "us v. them" or "red v. blue" view of the world. He met author Richard Rohr who advocates *contemplatio*, the wordless prayer of the heart. When this happens, Rohr says, "You stop reflecting, critiquing or analyzing and let the moment be what it is, as it is, all that it is. That takes a lot of surrender."

Bahnson also spent time with Center for Spiritual Imagination director Reverend Adam Bucko and his friend Sister Alison McCrary. They showed Bahnson the importance of a faith community. In November 2019, he joined Bucko and students from Adelphi University as they all handed out sandwiches to homeless people in Hempstead, New York. McCrary sat next to Bahnson at a contemplative prayer service the next evening. McCrary, a New Orleans teacher, helps provide food and shelter to ICE detainees, offers pro bono legal services to people living in Louisiana's Cancer Alley and visits men on Angola's death row. She says, "I don't believe you can have contemplation without action, and you can't have action without contemplation. The life of a Christian is not a solo act. Jesus went to the desert alone to pray, but he was always building a community. It's a both-and." .

Lord, thank you for being a stronghold, our stronghold, where we encounter you through worship and service. Thank you for Nassau Presbyterian Church, a wonderful community of active contemplatives. Amen.



Marshall experiences *contemplatio* on long walks through the fields and woods of Mercer County and since 2011, in worship at Nassau Presbyterian Church. He works for the state of New Jersey.

Saturday

Psalm 32

Then I acknowledged my sin to you
 and did not cover up my iniquity.
 I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."
 And you forgave the guilt of my sin.
 You are my hiding place;
 you will protect me from trouble
 and surround me with songs of deliverance.
 Many are the woes of the wicked,
 but the Lord's unfailing love
 surrounds the one who trusts in him (Psalm 32:5, 7, 10 NIV).

Elizabeth (Liz) Holland-Hough Beasley

God knows that we are fallible, weak, and, despite our best efforts, imperfect. The Lord doesn't ask for what is impossible for us. He asks us to be open with him, to admit our sins and our guilt, and promises that he will forgive us.

But the Lord goes further, and offers more: to those who trust him, he offers protection and deliverance from trouble, and surrounds us with his unfailing love. What spouse can offer those terms? What parent? God offers a love that no mortal can match. And he offers it to all of us, no matter how flawed, if we will only trust him.

In these difficult times, when illness, death, financial hardship, and political upheaval devastate millions of people in our own country and around the world, it is good to know that we are not alone. God is in our corner, and will surround us with love, protection, and forgiveness, if we will only trust in him.

Dear Lord, please forgive us our sins and be always beside us, going and coming, surrounding us with your forgiveness, protection, and unfailing love. Amen.



Liz joined Nassau Church in 2007 and has served as a ruling elder and on the Membership Committee and the Adult Education Committee. Since retiring from Rutgers University–New Brunswick in June 2019, she serves the congregation as a deacon, volunteers with Villages in Partnership, a church mission partner, and reads to her granddaughters every afternoon via Facetime. She and her husband, Kim Beasley, live in Princeton.

First Sunday

Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Genesis 9:8-11 NRSV).

John F. Kelsey, III

Every Judeo-Christian child knows this story as God is saving the good—Noah’s family and two of each of earth’s creatures—from the flood. But the story gets a lot more complicated as we grow up and understand its nu-

ances. The water is the key to understanding the covenant. We Presbyterians believe in only two sacraments—Baptism and Communion—and usually we are only baptized once, just as there was only one great flood. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, and then he fasted for 40 days while Satan tempted him...unsuccessfully.

Lord, we are tempted constantly, and few of us remember our baptism. But we all can remember Noah fighting the flood and maintaining the covenant with God. Help us to use this tool to fight temptation. Amen.

Pam and John have been blessed to be part of this congregation since 1974. Nassau has helped us better understand how to believe and practice what Jesus would have us do.

Monday

Psalm 16

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.

For you do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.

You show me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:9–11 NRSV).

Josie Brothers

Throughout my life, I have found it easier to pray in times of gratitude and thanksgiving than in times of strife and turbulence. When things are going as planned and I feel content, I never think twice about God's path for me. But when I encounter bumpy roads, I feel uneasy and tend to completely question God's intentions. These verses act as a gentle reminder that God will never forsake us or lead us astray. The Lord is our protector and mighty friend who makes known to us that death will never separate

us from the Lord's love. Because of this, I can rest peacefully and take a step back from my anxieties and concerns. I can learn to praise God with song and harmony through all the chapters of my life knowing that the Lord is always by my side.

Dear God, I will praise you endlessly in both the joyful and sorrowful times of my life, and I will rest soundly knowing that you will keep me safe. Amen.

Josie is a freshman at Elon University where she is studying elementary education and history. She enjoys music and the arts, and she is currently involved in a Presbyterian fellowship group at school.

Tuesday

1 Peter 3:8–18a

But in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:15–17 NIV).

Lois Foley

At the end of November 2020, I made a conscious decision to stop engaging the news on a daily basis. My decision was based on the need to eliminate unnecessary anxiety and worry after feeling an overload of both for so many months prior. I simply wanted to take back what had become the media control of my life and was beyond exhausted from the dreaded two “Ps” that we all know too well: Pandemic and Politics. After just a couple of weeks, something amazing started to happen, hope returned to me. Instead of reading a newsfeed on my phone, I started reading a daily devotional and the scripture that guided it. Rather than turning to CNN, I turned to the Psalms that we had studied during my small group back in November. What I had known from the time of my youth, though many times clouded by the world's unreasonable demands and expectations, was

made clear to me once again. Christ is my hope; Christ is our hope.

It certainly seems, though, that hope is much harder to spread than fear. Rather, a conscious effort needs to be made to turn things around. Nassau Church, if Christ is your hope, let us all come together communally and drown out the fear and malicious slander that has overtaken our families, communities and country. With gentleness and love, let us lead by Christ's example. Put Christ back in control of your life, and soon you too will experience the wondrous return of hope—two “Ps” or not.

God, draw us closer to you each day. Help us to see, to truly understand, that when our lives are Christ centered, there is little room for the outside influences of this world, which are not pleasing to you and cause us harm. Thank you for your love and the example of your blessed Son. Help us to stop anticipating, stop stressing and to hope, just hope. Amen.



Lois has been a member of Nassau since March of 2018. She enjoys her participation in the Church Mouse program and has met many new friends in Nassau's small groups. Lois is a family law paralegal to a New Brunswick firm. She enjoys distance walking and the beauty of nature in all seasons. Grown children Meghan, Rachel (husband Adam) and Bryan are her joy.

Wednesday

Proverbs 30:1–9 and Psalm 23

I am weary, O God. How can I prevail? (Proverbs 30:1c NRSV).

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
 he leads me beside still waters;
 he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
 for his name's sake (Psalm 23:2–3 NRSV).

Frances Katrishen

IAM WEARY. Yes, I am so weary, so weary of the pandemic and civil discord. I am weary of the daily rising death toll, sickness, grief, hunger, social injustice, and economic distress for many people all compounded by political and social strife. Wave after wave, it seems to go on forever. My teeth are clenched, my head is throbbing, and my body is tense with the pent-up urge to fight or flee. But, I feel helpless; if I were to fight or flee, I would only make matters worse. I collapse in my chair doom-scrolling the bad news or escaping into TV fantasies. I am not prevailing against these feelings of anguish and despair. I cry out to God. I am so weary, help!

Scripture tells me that God hears my cries and shows me the way out of my anguish. Prayer and restorative walks give me the peace to prevail over despair. I sense Jesus calming the waters and saying: “Peace, I give you my peace.” I experience the peace of still waters and green pastures. I sense God is leading me to do my small part to overcome this calamity by praying and supporting others.

Lord God, your people are weary. We long for our suffering to end. God, lead us out of this tribulation to your restorative peace. God, restore our souls. By the power of the Holy Spirit, instruct each of us in the right way to go. Give us your peace and lead us each and every day. We pray for the time when we all enjoy your holy peace in this world as it is in heaven. Amen.

Frances sings in the adult choir and as a deacon is part of the deacon's group prayer ministry. She is the wife of Nicos Scordis and mother of Camille. She is a retired international business analyst and professor. She is matriculated at the General Seminary in New York beginning in the fall of 2021 where she will earn a Master's in Arts with a concentration in Spirituality.

Thursday

Psalm 25

Make your ways known to me, LORD.
 teach me your paths.
 Lead me in your truth (Psalm 25:4-5 CEB).

Lynne Seidel

“Teach me your paths” was my choice of verse in my high school year-book. Still, sixty years later, I seek to know God, and keep alert for every glimmer. I love poet Mary Oliver's

“Instructions for living a life:
 Pay attention.
 Be astonished.
 Tell about it.”

God, help us keep on your path, undistracted by all around us today. Amen.



A member of Nassau since 1976, when the family wore red, white and blue for the church photo directory, Lynne loves being part of this one-of-a-kind congregation. She can't wait until her several new joints can walk into the old sanctuary.

Friday

Genesis 16:1–6

Sarai said to Abram, “You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her?”... Abram went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when Hagar saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you!”... Abram said to Sarai, “Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and Hagar ran away from her (Genesis 16:2–6 NRSV).

Jonathan C. Shenk

Bono, the frontman of the enduring Irish rock band U2, said: “That the Scriptures are brim full of hustlers, murderers, cowards, adulterers, and mercenaries used to shock me. Now it is a source of great comfort.”

This drama between Abram, Sarai, and Hagar is one such shocking story. And, as in any recounted story, it’s hard to know exactly where the truth lies. In later chapters, does God really instruct Abram to send Hagar and their child Ishmael into the desert where they almost die of thirst (21:12)? Or is Abram simply seeking justification for his own bad choices?

The biblical stories come alive as the living, breathing Word of God as we discover that each character—whether noble or self-serving, and usually both—reflects who we also are. Knowing that the Scriptures unabashedly reflect our common humanity can be a source of comfort, as Bono suggests. The chasm between us and those with whom we feel we have nothing in common is not as vast as we imagine. Regardless of all our screw-ups and self-justifications, God is continually at work within us and through us to serve God’s purposes in the world.

During this Lenten season, as we reflect on Jesus, the Living Word, we encounter God’s unwavering commitment to creating and revealing what right relationships look like. The challenge before us is to release our grasp for power and self-preservation so we are free to fully embrace God’s restoring work in our lives and relationships.

God of truth and grace, reveal to us the fullness of your love and power. Give us strength and courage. Help us to trust and participate in your redeeming work in our lives and in the world. Amen.



Jonathan, a Presbyterian minister, is the owner of Greenleaf Painters, a local painting company. In addition to his business involvement, he is a spiritual director and an advocate for transforming the criminal justice system. He lives in Princeton Junction with his wife Cynthia Yoder, an author. They are avid fans of their son Gabriel's indie rock band, Sonoa.

Saturday

Psalm 31

Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.
You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake, lead me and guide me (Psalm 31:2a-3 NRSV).

Gordon Thomas

A tree can grow—with considerable difficulty—through a rock, but then “how firm a foundation”! As in this picture from the Sourland Mountains, a rock has guided one tree until that tree has found light and soared upward. We too can use the firm foundation of our faith to lead us and guide us through pandemic darkness toward light.



Strengthen our faith in all that we do. Despite troubles in our world and challenges to our beliefs, help us stay rooted in our faith. Amen.



Gordon Thomas has been teaching and singing with preschoolers for about a third of a century at Nassau Church. Separately, he is a Fellow of the American Physical Society to which he was elected for his scientific papers and a Member of the National Academy of Inventors for his patents. He recently retired as a Professor of Physics at NJIT after work at Bell Labs, Harvard, MIT, and the University of Tokyo. He is currently studying running, and photography.